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**Identifying and Assisting Students  
With Emotional Problems  
or  
Students Who Are Disruptive in  
Class**

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Student Development  
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COUNSELING RESOURCE CENTER

Room-D102

718-368-5975

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Coordinator of Counseling

Ms. Dasha Gorinshteyn  
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ESL Counseling Coordinator

Part Time Staff:

Ms. Marilyn Chernin  
Ms. Maria Francavilla  
Ms. Ilona Fridson  
Dr. Natalie Rubinton  
Ms. Kolone Scanlan  
Ms. Orsolya Varkonyi  
Ms. Patricia Yoon

**Additional Campus Resources:**

Office of the Dean of Students:  
(718) 368-5563/ A-216

Health Services:  
(718) 368-5684/ A-108

HELM (Health and Lifestyle Management):  
(718) 368-4909/ T-7 Building

Public Safety:  
(718) 368-5069/ L-202

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**Off Campus Resources:**

National Suicide Prevention Hotline:  
1-800-SUICIDE (1-800-784-2433)

The JED Foundation (Suicide Prevention)  
(212) 647-7544

National Institute of Mental Health  
1-800-421-4211

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Please contact us:  
(718) 368-5975  
D-102

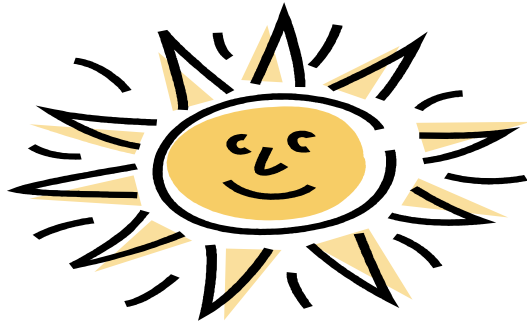
- We have evening hours on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday nights.

*We would like to credit Queensborough Community College, Trinity College & East Tennessee State University for the partial development of this manual.*

## Other Helpful Tips...

- It is not helpful to tell students, “look on the bright side” or “you’ll get over it”.
- Don’t feel afraid to ask if they are suicidal (most likely this is not the first time they have had these thoughts). Studies indicate that roughly 10% of college students had thoughts of suicide in the past year and 1.4% admitted to attempting it.
- Be direct and non judgmental when talking with students.
- It is helpful to know about the counseling center & services offered at KCC.
- Find out if students have resources at home, etc.
- Find out if they have ever used counseling services in the past.

*Mental illness is protected under the Americans with Disabilities Act. The college can intervene with disciplinary action of some sort when the behavior is disruptive. When the person is ill and the behavior is not disruptive, there is no basis for removal from a class or any other type of disciplinary action.*



## *Identifying and assisting students who may have **EMOTIONAL PROBLEMS***

Faculty members are usually the first persons in a college community to observe students who are experiencing personal distress. Some indications of a student experiencing problems are agitated behavior or withdrawal. Students may also reveal problems through personal communication to the faculty, both oral and written. The following general descriptions are made to help faculty recognize and refer students who present with behavioral or emotional problems.

### **Agitated Behavior**

- The student speaks out in class without waiting to be recognized.
- The student interrupts other students or the instructor.
- The student walks around the classroom/ comes and goes often.
- The student appears emotionally volatile, loses his/her temper, cries easily, or uses profane language.
- The student comes in late, pushes chairs around and becomes disruptive when taking a seat.

### **Withdrawn Behavior**

- The student is excessively absent or frequently late.
- The student sits in the back of the room and/or does not participate in class. (Keep in mind that cultural factors, as well as anxiety about speaking in class, may inhibit student participation.)
- The student frequently displays drowsiness or sleeps in class.
- The student frequently daydreams as exemplified by inappropriate responses when asked a question.
- The student is engrossed in other reading in class.
- The student might have a vacant stare.

- It is important to try to resist the temptation to “profile” students. However, as faculty you are in an excellent position to recognize behavior changes in a troubled student.
- A student’s concerning behavior may be a “cry for help”.
- Student behaviors exist along a continuum that can range in level of concern and severity from distressed, disturbing, disruptive, and dangerous.

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Because of the enormous emotional and social transitions experienced while in college, it is likely that most students will grapple with a host of issues during their college years. Some of these issues may include fitting in socially, handling problems at home, grief, sexual assault, anxiety, depression, relationship issues, issues of sexual identity, sleep problems, and many more. The goal is to identify who is in need of services and help them to receive assistance!

Research has indicated that students who reported having significant emotional problems over the previous year and had more functional relationships with their advisors were more likely to use mental health services.



### **Recognizing Depression in Particular:**

- Students may report lack of energy, loss of appetite, weight loss or weight gain.
- Students may appear lonely and withdrawn.
- Students may indicate in writing that they want to end one’s life.
- Students may be irritable and short tempered.
- Students may share consistently negative thoughts in classroom discussion or may seem hopeless about their future.
- Students may demonstrate really poor self esteem.
- Students may fall asleep or may be frequently absent from class.
- Students from other countries may talk about “culture shock” and being homesick.

### **Intervention...**

As a faculty member you are often on the front line. A student may feel comforted just by a simple act of indicating that you are concerned. They may feel relief that someone else cares. You may use the following language when talking to a student :

- “I’ve noticed that you’ve appeared sad and withdrawn during our last few meetings...”
- “I’m aware that you have fallen asleep in class more often during the past few weeks...”
- “I’m concerned about your tendency to come late to class lately and I want to make sure that you are okay...”

(b) The faculty member could make a referral to either the Office of the Dean of Students or the Counseling Resource Center. Often, referrals are made to the Dean of Students and depending on the issue, the Dean of Students office may defer to Counseling. The student may or may not be brought up on disciplinary charges.

(c) Often, whether or not the student is not brought up on disciplinary charges, Counseling meets with the student to explore the circumstances leading up to the crisis or behavioral problem.

(d) Faculty should keep accurate records of what has transpired in the classroom.

*\* **NOTE:** Any reference to suicide is serious and a referral to counseling is strongly advised. You should not leave the student alone if he/she manifests suicidal intent. Please walk the student to the counseling office or call Public Safety. Alternatively, students could be walked to the Health Services Office.*



### Signs Of Psychological Distress

Some signs of psychological distress are obvious, but others are subtle or ambiguous.

#### Obvious signs include :

- Bizarre or strange behavior
- References to harming self or others
- Crying or persistent sadness
- Nervousness, agitation impaired speech, tics
- High level of irritability
- Marked deterioration

#### Ambiguous signs include:

- Dependency (e.g., excessive demands on your time)
- Excessive procrastination or very poor work
- Inability to make decisions
- Persistent sleepiness
- Persistent lack of interest
- Monopolizing of classroom discussion

## HOW TO HELP

Once a student manifests some of the signs of emotional distress, a faculty member may take one or more of the following actions:

1. Approach the student and suggest a meeting after class. The meeting should be in a private location.
2. Indicate in a supportive manner that you have noticed that the student seems "troubled/upset." "tuned out"
3. If the student does not want to discuss any personal matters with you respect his/her reluctance and gently indicate that counselors are available at the College.
4. If the student indicates a willingness to discuss his/her problems, listen —without making too many responses or suggestions.
5. If you think the student would be receptive to seeing a counselor at the College, discuss referring him/her to the Counseling Resource Center. You may choose to contact a counselor you know personally or call the office at the following main number: (718) 368-5975. It is advisable to accompany the student to the office in D-102 versus leaving it to them to come on their own. Alternatively, you can ask that a counselor contact a student if the student knows that you have arranged this.

## HANDLING DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR

In the Classroom

A student's disruptive behavior (i.e., hostile or inappropriate remarks, repeated lateness, frequent interruptions, walking around the room, slamming books on the desk ) may present a challenge to the faculty member's resourcefulness and patience and may subvert the teaching process and interfere with other students' learning.

When a student is defiant it is essential to avoid confrontation in the classroom. In this setting, the student may feel a need to save face and may not back down in front of other students. If the student is violent, faculty are advised to avoid escalating the situation, speak calmly and avoid physical contact.

### ***Some suggestions for dealing with disruptive students:***

- Ask the student to leave the classroom with you and escort him/ her to a place where you can talk privately.
- If the student is unwilling to leave the classroom to talk with you, contact the security office and request assistance.
- After a disruptive episode in which a counselor has not been involved, the following suggestions are made to help resolve a crisis:
  - (a) Arrange a meeting between the counselor and the faculty member to discuss strategies for dealing with the student.